

HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Perceptions of Ally Confrontations

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Confrontations, in which one person points out and discourages the use of another's prejudicial or stereotypical remark, have been extensively studied within social psychology. The literature reliably shows that people reduce their future expressions of bias when confronted, but it remains unclear how minority-group members perceive confrontations of racial prejudice on behalf of their racial/ethnic group, or if their evaluations are moderated by the social identity of the confronter. We proposed another potential benefit of confrontations—their ability to provide a “safety cue,” signaling that one’s identity belongs and is valued in a given setting.

We recruited 214 Chinese-American women through a Qualtrics Panel to complete an online study to test our hypotheses in the context of racial (specifically anti-Asian) prejudice. These women read stories about different group interactions featuring an anti-Asian comment, and a confrontation made by either a white, black, or other Chinese woman depending on condition (additional appended conditions: No Confrontation, No Biased Comment made). Then, participants recorded their responses in a feeling thermometer and measures of belonging, safety, and desire to join the group, consistent with previous literature on safety cues.

We found that white confronters provided a marginal safety cue and boosted participant attitudes towards the group, as well as their feelings of belonging and safety, so that they were non-significantly different to when No Biased Comment was made. This highlights the importance of dominant-group allies speaking up and confronting bias, because they may be most effective at making others feel the safest and most included.

Research advisor Margo Monteith writes: “Past research shows that confronting others’ stereotypic or prejudicial responses is a powerful means of curbing their bias. Celine’s research is the first to investigate whether minority groups regard confrontations as safety cues signaling that they can feel a sense of belonging in a group setting.”



Celine’s presentation of this research at the 91st meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago, IL (April 2019).